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FURNISHING OF COUNTRY HOUSES.

BY RALPH A. CRAM.

NUMBER TWO—THE HALL.

MR. CRAM proposes to contribute a series of articles on the Furnishing and Decoration of Country Houses, to be continued in consecutive numbers.—(Ed.)

ONE of the most important features, which we have borrowed from the grand old castles and manor houses of England, is that of making the hall the actual and social centre of the house. Not only is this arrangement manifestly the most economical and convenient, but it has the sanction of centuries of use, a consideration by no means to be despised in matters of art. In those wondrous old mansions, the hall was the sitting room, and formerly the parlor, dining hall and sometimes even kitchen, but civilization has been too much for the old hall, and it has become smaller and smaller, until now it has dwindled to the dreary, dusty "entrance tunnel," of the modern suburban residence. So utterly devoid of individuality has this generation become, that there are now eight different kinds of dwelling houses, and it is only necessary to see the outside of any of them to determine at once in regard to the plan. This system, although of great convenience to burglars, is destructive to any artistic effect.

The long, wide halls of the old Colonial mansions were very beautiful. There is no reason why modern buildings should not be as charming and hospitable as were the old examples, except that in some things we do not know as much as they did a century ago. Then, again, why is it that the stairway is invariably made straight, and therefore uninteresting? It certainly is more difficult of ascent, and also lacks the charm of a winding stairway. The arrangement of this room depends, of course, on the position of the house, but there are some features which should be common to every hall. The location should be such as to afford easy communication with all the principal living rooms, but nothing should interfere with the light, which should be copious and direct. In summer the superfluous light may be easily cut off, but hardly anything can redeem a room which is naturally dark in winter. Colored glass should be used more; I do not mean the borders of hideous red and blue glass, which we sometimes find in modern houses, and which is unpardonable, but the delicate, tender, opalescent glass, which is made so exquisitely nowadays. The warm, subdued light which this gives will do much towards rendering an otherwise cheerless room cozy and homelike.

It is useless to attempt to have a comfortable sitting room without a fireplace, which is the great feature distinguishing a house from a home. Without an open fireplace no hall will ever be homelike. The wider the fireplace is, the better; have it ten feet wide and large enough to sit in, and it will be most hospitable.

If the house is intended for summer use entirely, a most dignified and, at the same time, airy effect may be obtained by allowing the hall ceiling to extend quite to the roof. An open timber ceiling is probably the most appropriate, but two or three heavy beams dividing it into a number of sections is an excellent alternative. These spaces adapt themselves most readily to decoration, and if filled in with paper of rich, but indistinct color and design, the effect is pleasing. Many object to heavy window curtains on the ground that they catch the dust, but this is rendered less objectionable if they hang in straight folds, as they invariably should.

The floor should be of hard wood, either plain or laid in some geometric pattern. Marble or stone should never be used under any circumstances, as they are cold and cheerless. A carpet is equally bad, only on widely different grounds.

Do not buy everything that bears the name of a Turkish rug; the recent importations are very inferior both in color and make; civilization has done much towards ruining these beautiful works of art. Persian and Moorish carpets are always good, but in a short time they probably become corrupted. The best designs for carpets are those wherein a subdued tone is not produced by dull, muddy colors, but by the judicious mixture of brilliant colors in minute quantities. All the Eastern work is of this last description.

Do not be afraid of using color in the decoration of this room; the richest hues are the ones to use; reds and browns, golden-green, purplish-crimson and those indiscernible shades of crimson-brown, like wine lees. Grays, white, and light gray color are utterly out of place here. In this hall, which is the common sitting room of the family, the furniture should be suited to all ages and tastes. Uniformity in design is far more desirable, and the older and more varied it is, the better.

Although the easy chair, couches, tables and so forth, should be plentiful, yet the least sign of confusion should be rigorously avoided.

The accompanying plate represents the hall, or sitting room, of a large country mansion, intended to be inhabited all the year round, and is, therefore, a home and not a hotel, as is the case with most of our houses which are used only half the year. The guest enters at once the little vestibule, shown in the centre of the drawing, through a wide, generous door which leads from a broad tenement, a feature which should be used more in American houses. This link between nature and art is finished in dark bronze-green oak wainscoting. The floor is of dark-green tiles, and a tawny lion skin lies in front of the entrance door. A little stairway runs up and connects with the main flight, thus enabling one to enter and go up stairs without being observed by the people who may be in the great hall. From the oak ceiling hangs a lamp of wrought iron, made in Venice at the time when iron was not considered too common for artists to work in. A portiere of dull red Japanese stuff, embroidered with gold thread, hangs in the door which opens into the sitting room. The hall is large and lofty; dark-green oak wainscoting reaches to the top of the doors; the wall is covered with Japanese leather paper, subdued by illuminated red, stamped with wheels and peacock's eyes in dark gold and peacock-blue, this last is used in but very small quantities; over all is scattered a powdering of greenish-gold. The frieze is green oak richly carved; the ceiling is the same oak, quite plain except for numerous brass-headed nails with which it is studded; the floor is oak and mahogany, covered with Oriental rugs, principally dull red and golden-green in tone. Easy chairs abound, and in the centre of the room is a large table covered with a Persian cloth of rich, yet quiet color. Luxurious cushions, covered with soft Turkish stuffs, are heaped round the table and serve in place of ordinary chairs. At the end of the room, raised several steps, is an octagonal alcove, which contains the fireplace; the ceiling is much lower than the rest of the hall, and is lighted from four sides. The mantel is of yellowish white marble, quite plain, with the exception of a band of bas reliefs near the top. The walls are golden-red, stenciled with arabesques of green, gold and peacock-blue. The broad divan is heaped high with soft cushions covered with Japanese material, subdued red and sea-green in color; the casement windows are filled with golden and sea-green antique glass; the curtains and draperies are dull red embroidered with golden-green. A dainty table of the time of Louis Quatorze stands on one side to hold a book, wine glass or other comforts on a dreary winter day. Artificial light is given by the old wrought brass chandelier suspended in the archway, and also from two slender lamps on tall tripods copied from the Greek. There the alcoves forms a snug retreat in winter, and as the fireplace would have no attraction for one in summer, a tiny sitting room is reached from the stairs landing. Down the stairway pours a flood of soft, opalescent light from the great windows on the landing, which is very large, and also from the sitting room before mentioned. This work, although actually a part of the stairway, is quite isolated from it by Arabian screenwork and a forest of tropical plants. Thus the tone of the stairway is cool and green, and the light being from the north-west, is always even and cool. Further up the stairway is the little balcony shown in the drawing over the vestibule entrance. This gallery is partly hidden from the hall by draperies, and the Arabian screenwork, which in the day shows dark against the window filled with golden and green glass, which is behind it, and which opens on a little exterior balcony looking towards the West.

OUR CINCINNATI LETTER.

THE opinion, expressed to your correspondent last month by the leading men in the furniture trade, that indications in every direction were most promising for a vigorous and increased business, proves to have been well founded. Manufacturers have all they can do to fill existing orders, and the large accumulated stock of the spring and summer is rapidly lessening under a brisk Southern and Western demand. Orders are coming in largely in excess of last year, and the best of feeling prevails among manufacturers in every department of business. All the conditions are eminently satisfactory, and it looks as if the furniture trade, which is one of the leading interests of Cincinnati, was entering upon a new era of prosperity. Five new factories are in process of erection. Some of these are to increase the scope of a business, which has outgrown what, at the outset of its career, seemed ample facilities, and others are new establishments, the outcome of capital seeking investment in a business which offers so attractive a field of operations.

The Exposition, now in progress, has attracted to this market a large number of buyers, and the furniture men take

a very natural pride in the handsome contributions their trade has made to the Exposition display. The exhibit of the Robert Mitchell Furniture Co. proves to be one of the most attractive features of the entire Exposition, not only to those who are well up in art ideas, but to the least instructed eye, because of a certain perfection of design and finish which is apparent in the simplest productions of this house. Two interiors are fitted up with every luxurious detail of art decoration, from inlaid floors to tinted ceilings, for the displaying of their furniture. A bed room set—bedstead, dresser, chiffonier, commode and mantelpiece all *en suite* in black walnut, are displayed in one of these improvised interiors. All the pieces are of noble proportions, the decorations very rich. The frieze of the high head-board is composed of alternate floral and rosette panels carved in high relief. This is supported by double pilasters of polished walnut on either side, and in the centre is a broad arched panel of French walnut. In the low foot-board the same panels, pilasters and rich inlaying is repeated, and the same theory of decoration reappears in the other pieces, modified to suit their different uses. In the second interior is shown a mantel in the Renaissance style, just finishing for the handsome house of C. S. Bragg, Esq., exhibited through his courtesy. A series of ebony panels, enriched with exquisite relief carvings, voluted scrolls, rosettes and graceful garlands in white holly wood, frame the superb plate glass mirror. The shelf is of fluted holly and mahogany, with relief panels in either pediment. Here too is shown a magnificent cabinet of old oak, decorated with relief carvings, also a sideboard of admirable proportions, and quite plain but for two panels richly carved; a pair of chairs, one in sumptuous Cardovan leather, and the other in garnet brocaded velvet, enriched with a band of wrought brass across the back of the broad arms. Some exquisitely dainty pieces in the Adam style, chairs, half moon tables, and a fine cabinet are also features of the display. That the designs, construction, carvings and inlay are all the work of the regular employees of the firm is a matter of special pride to the house. The artisans have carried out the thoughts of the artist in the construction of these pieces, which, by the way, are selected from the regular stock and are not *pieces de parade*, in a way to secure unqualified approval.

The Meader Furniture Company exhibit among other choice pieces a bed-room suite in mahogany very richly carved and of excellent proportions. Five reception chairs, one in crimson satin, and the other in gold and bronze brocade, are excellent examples of fine upholstery for which this house is famous. Wehrman & Co.'s most striking contribution is a luxurious "saddle-bag," drawing-room suite of crimson plush, relieved by wood bands of decoration in gold and Persian colorings.

The Sextro Furniture Co.'s display of centre-tables and hat-racks, selected from their regular stock, is a most effective one. One hat-rack combining a low table with a broad bevel plate mirror, framed in richly carved sunflower panels, is an admirable model. The Queen City Cabinet Company makes a very full display of the latest novelties in cabinet ware. Dainty old-time tables, and escritoires in mahogany, screens and pedestals in carved ebony, charming little scroll-topped tables, some of them plush covered, being conspicuous.

J. Dornette & Co. make a handsome display of library and cylinder desks and office chairs, and the Wootton Desk Co. also show a full line of their well-known desks.

H. H. Wiggers contributes several book-cases of admirable style. One especially, in mahogany, sold too, and attracts much favorable comment.

A. Haberkorn, J. G. F. Grote, and the Eastern Woven Wire Mattress Co. make a very attractive exhibit in their specialties.

Billings, Ault & Co. have very much increased the reputation of their lawn chairs and settees, by their exhibit at the Exposition. They have placed them in the vestibule, corridors, and in other convenient places for the use of visitors, and the tired sight-seers call down upon them as many blessings as Sancho Panza did upon the man who invented sleep. These blessings are expected to crystallize into a perfect shower of orders next summer. Lack of space forbids further mention of exhibits, except that of A. E. Albro & Co., whose display of veneers and fancy cabinet woods is one of the most beautiful constructive things in the Exposition, and attracts marked attention. The arrangement is most artistic, and the examples all unique. Immense burls of French walnut mark the corners of the space, which is barricaded by immense logs of rosewood, San Domingo mahogany, African ebony, fragrant Spanish cedar, Turkish boxwood, purple cocobolo and amaranth, and golden chestnut and olive wood. The walls are decorated with veneers of various precious woods, and the exhibits delight the eye of the artist as much as the woodworkers. Mr. E. D. Norton, Superintendent of the Company, is also Superintendent of the Machinery Department of the Exposition, which he has arranged with complete success.

The throng of Exposition visitors has varied from ten to twenty thousand each day since the doors were opened, and the majority of these are transient in the city. The retail dealers are not insensible to the fact that Heaven sends these fish to their net, and they accordingly put out their prettiest bait. The Fourth street shop windows are as gay as if it were a Roman Carnival, and no where is greater effect secured than behind the plate glass of the Upholstery and Carpet Houses.

At the handsome show-rooms of The John Shillito Company, we noticed some very choice colorings in turcomans, terra-cotta effects, India reds and blues, and dull Indian mixtures alternating in broad stripes. The square framed Turkish drawing-room suites, upholstered in "saddle-bag" fashion, are capable of very good effects in the hands of experienced workmen.

Snowden & Co. and George F. Otte & Co. report that the new tinsel effects in turcomans, introduced last Spring, will be very popular. This tinsel adds much to the gayety of its appearance unquestionably, but in view of the fact that tinsel cannot hold its brilliancy, it can scarcely meet the approval of conservative buyers.